

F-86D Sabre Dog

The burgeoning Cold War of the late 1940s and the run-down state of air defenses for the continental United States made the procurement of a jet interceptor a priority for the new USAF. Northrop's F-89 Scorpion was to be bought for this mission, but problems with the Scorpion meant that interim aircraft were also needed. Although the basic Sabre was a day fighter, the design had considerable "stretch" potential, and North American had devised an interceptor derivative, initially designated the F-95, to be known as the F-86D in service.

Virtually the entire airframe was changed, with the wing planform being retained, but with the inner structure reinforced. More outwardly remarkable were the alterations to the fuselage, with a large radome for the APG-37 radar being fitted atop the recontoured intake. Conclusively destroying Soviet bombers such as the Tu-4 Bull demanded a much more powerful weapon than machine guns, and thus the F-86D was to be the first US fighter to be armed solely with rockets. These took the form of two dozen 2.75" FFARs housed in a retractable tray under the forward fuselage.

While other interceptors of the day such as the F-89 and F-94 relied on two-man crews, the F-86D was to be a single-seater, with the aircraft's sophisticated fire control system taking over many of the tasks of the back seater. On the fighter had been guided to the general area of a target by a GCI station, the pilot locked onto the enemy aircraft with his own radar. This was coupled to the Hughes E-4 fire control system, which would then generate steering cues for a lead collision-course intercept, and automatically fire the rockets once in range.

F-86L

After all the delays and rework involved in bringing the Sabre Dog into service, the type was not in use long before a further conversion plan was instituted under the F-86L program. This made the aircraft compatible with the SAGE system, which fed target information ("bogey dope") electronically to the interceptor through a data link. Aerodynamically, the F-86Ls had their wingtips extended out by 12 inches and the 6-3 leading edge extensions installed.

F-86K

The Sabre Dog family was completed by the NA-205/F-86K, an export version for NATO partners, with the rocket armament replaced by a quartet of M24 cannon, which in turn necessitated a slight stretch of the fuselage. The MG-4 fire control system was fitted.

North American converted a pair of incomplete F-86Ds into the YF-86K prototypes, and went on to build 120 production examples for Norway and the Netherlands. Fiat was to build the type under license for Italy, Germany, and France. Venezuela was supplied with former Luftwaffe F-86Ks in 1966, and Yugoslavia flew second-hand examples alongside F-86Ds.

Sabre Dog Bibliography:

Hamilton Standard ad, featuring artwork (highly stylized) of an F-86D Aviation Week September 18, 1950 p.11

"F-86D's Rocket Launcher Shown" Aviation Week March 23, 1953 p.16

Photo: YF-86K prototype with gear down. Aviation Week September 20, 1954 p.7

“D For Defender!” North American Aviation ad with artwork depicting a pair of F-86Ds shooting rockets in bad weather. Aviation Week November 8, 1954 p.5

Ad for Solar ground power units, with a photo showing a sharkmouthed F-86D. Aviation Week November 15, 1954 p.44

Photo: F-86D at the Hellenic Air Force Museum FlyPast January 1998 p.97

Gerry Manning **1000 Preserved Military Aircraft** p.13 photo Greek F-86D 51-6171 in camouflage

Lloyd S. Jones **U.S. Fighters: Army-Air Force 1925 to 1980s** p.230-231 F-86D 3-view, photo of a Sabre Dog with experimental underwing rocket pods

“Air Lines – North American F-86D, K-L Sabre” Mark Rolfe, 1:72 scale plans with cross sections + P.31 22 color profiles of USAF, Greek, Yugoslavian, South Korean, and Philippines F-86Ds, ANG F-86Ls (Colorado, Oklahoma & Georgia units) French, West German, RAAF, RDAF, Italian, and Venezulean F-86Ks. Scale Aircraft Modelling Vol 21, No.1

Larry Schramm “Workbench Reviews: Kitty Hawk’s new F-86D shines” FineScale Modeler November 2015 p.56-57

Jim Winchester **American Military Aircraft: A History of Innovation** p.348-349: color profile of F-86D *Ol Rover* of the 94th FIS/1st Fighter Group; small frontal shot of an F-86K armed with Sidewinders

Boneyard Almanac: 20th Century Picture Book p.37: photos of F-86Ls 53-0904 and 53-4020



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